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ABSTRACT

In searching for a concept of organization which recognizes its base in human action rather than in objective structure, the author draws on a European tradition stemming from the works of Max Weber. This tradition, combined with examples of organizational life in schools, serves to identify implications for those who attempt to design better organizational forms. These implications suggest to the author that the problems with schools will not be solved by manipulating the external structures of organizations but rather, by dealing with the often conflicting views and values of those acting within these structures. The author suggests that the task of changing organizations depends on the varieties of reality that individuals see in existing organizations, and on the acceptance of new ideas concerning what is possible and desirable to do through social action. He suggests that, although little is known about either of these dependencies, the first should be understood before the second is directed. (Author/DN)

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ORGANIZATIONS AS SOCIAL INVENTIONS: SOME CONSIDERATIONS

FOR THOSE WHO WOULD DESIGN SCHOOLS

TO SERVE HUMAN ENDS

REVISED

by

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ABSTRACT

Can we improve organizations by shaping their structure and process? Common sense and much of organization theory supports the view that it is organization itself which oppresses people and prevents them from realizing their best intentions. Acting on this view, critics and change agents have tried either to abolish structure or to design it to serve humane ends. An examination of these assumptions about organizations finds that abstract notions of organization resolve into goals and values held by individuals and that what we assume are universal organizational forms reduce to cultural artifacts. In searching for a concept of organization which recognizes its base in human action rather than in objective structure, the author draws upon an European tradition stemming from the works of Max Weber. This tradition combined with examples of organizational life in schools serves to identify implications for those who attempt--often with little success--to design better organizational forms. These implications suggest that our problems with schools will not yield to our manipulating the external trappings of organization--their familiar but spurious "structures." Rather we must deal with the often conflicting views and values of those acting within these structures. The task of changing organizations depends, first, upon the varieties of reality individuals

see in existing organizations, and second, upon their acceptance of new ideas of what it is possible and desirable to do through social action. We know little about either of these dependencies, but it is clear we should understand the first before we attempt to direct the second.

ORGANIZATIONS AS SOCIAL INVENTIONS: SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR
THOSE WHO WOULD DESIGN SCHOOLS TO SERVE HUMAN ENDS¹

Organizations serve as common targets for critics and reformers who see social institutions as frequently if not inherently opposed to human purposes and needs.² Consequently, change agents with varied but intense visions for improving organizations seek to transform them in ways which will liberate the human spirit rather than frustrate and alienate it--as organizations now do--under hostile goals and structures.³ Two critical assumptions appear to underlie this view of organizations. One is that organizations exist apart from people, thus making it possible to modify organizations or to design new ones without changing people. The second is that the goals of an organization are independent of individuals within them. By accepting these assumptions, a line of reasoning emerges which holds that the way to

- improve organizations is to re-design them and to direct them towards humane goals. The strategy for organizational improvement thus derived requires the shaping of organizations in terms of human needs rather than the forcing of individuals to organizational requirements. While there is dispute about what to change within the organization, we usually agree that organizations are entities capable of improvement and that organizations and individuals have goals which would be better

achieved if the organizations were smaller, less bureaucratic, "healthier," more structured, or more something which changed their internal structure or process.

In contrast, the argument of this paper holds that most of our current strategies for changing organizations rest upon an over-simplification which conveniently separates people and organizations. If we see individuals and organizations as inextricably intertwined, it may not be so easy to alter organizations without also cutting into something unexpectedly human. It is surely desirable that we have a vision of how organizations might be better; but we should also understand what we are changing when we offer new models for life in organizations. Such understanding takes us back to some curious and usually neglected phenomena found in the way people see the world and more particularly in the way they come to hold or change those views. In these times when many social institutions are under attack for changing or for failing to change, it is timely to ask what it is we change when we change an organization.

Within the general problem of what we mean by the concept "organization," I wish to raise two specific questions. These questions are first, "What is an organization that it can have such a thing as a goal?" and, secondly, "How do the goals of individuals bear upon those of the organization, if, indeed, it is appropriate to speak of organizational goals?" Clearly, these questions are inter-related and may, in fact, merely be different ways of asking whether organizations are

something more than the sum of their parts. These are not new questions in organizational analysis and I do not propose to offer new answers to them. What I wish to do is to suggest that we seldom ask these questions or pay attention to a compelling set of answers to them when we engage in efforts at organizational change. Such indifference might be justified except for the fact that adequate answers to these questions raise some serious doubts about our ability to change organizations or to design them to meet human needs. What is in question here is whether organizations have goals and whether structure and process within the organization have some bearing upon how well these goals are achieved.

What Is An Organization That It May Have A Goal?

At a pragmatic level, we have no difficulty believing that organizations are real and that they have goals apart from those of specific individuals who may have involvement with them. Prisons, banks, schools, hospitals, political parties, and armies are but a few examples of organizations whose reality and whose goals the individual may deny only to his disadvantage or even at his peril. That these organizations are "real" and that they have different goals seems obvious. Substantiating this commonsense view of organizations, theorists usually deal with organizations as objective "facts."⁴ Where there are differences among theorists, the argument usually turns on the nature of the "fact" observed, not upon what predisposes us to see organizations in terms of one set of facts rather than another.

Thus most theoretical perspectives on organizations foster our view of them as powerful, goal-oriented entities which operate on people rather than through them. A look at two major conceptions of organizations--systems and bureaucratic theory--reinforces this conclusion.

Bureaucratic theories of organization find reality in structure, which, expressed through specialization and hierarchy, operates to achieve pre-determined goals. In this view, organizations "planfully" solve problems, they "drive towards rationality," and they "invade" realms of action traditionally controlled by individuals.⁵ Thus the organization in effect strips its members of their personal motives and replaces them with those which serve the purposes of the organization. Accepting this view of the power of organizations apart from people within them, Perrow argues that

. . . people's attitudes are shaped at least as much by the organization in which they work as by their pre-existing attitudes.⁶

And again from Perrow:

. . . a great deal of organizational effort is exerted to control the effects of extra-organizational influences upon personnel. Daily, people come contaminated into the organization. . . . Many of the irritating aspects of organizational structure are designed to control these sources of contamination.⁷

In contrast to the bureaucratic view of organizations, the systems perspective rejects the notion of the organization striving to achieve goals external to itself but retains the concept of organization as an entity apart from its members and with power over them. An open system is defined as:

A bounded collection of interdependent parts . . . maintained in a steady state in relation to each other and the environment by means of (1) standard modes of operation, and (2) feedback from the environment about the consequences of system actions.⁸

~~The~~ systems theorists see homeostasis and feedback as critical in organizational life, since these processes operate to give purpose to the functioning organization. In the systems view, organizations appear not as mechanisms designed for the single-minded pursuit of goals set by external hands; rather, organizations discover goals through their capacity to respond and adapt to their environments. A fundamental problem for organizations is therefore to discover goals which will maintain the integrity of the system and ensure its survival in the environment. On this account, the "operative" goals⁹ of organizations as distinct from those formally promulgated for them are obscure and hard to identify. And for this reason, systems theorists are usually not concerned for specific goals of organizations, but only for the quality of basic organizational processes--for

the health of the organization.

The idea of an organization responding like an organism to its environment and thus discovering an equilibrium or goal which enables it to survive in its environment is a recurrent theme among systems theorists.¹⁰ Of course there are critics of bureaucratic and systems theory who proceed from a psychological viewpoint designed to take the individual into account. However, even these critics are apt to see the organization as a thing apart from its members. Thus Argyris¹¹ advocates that organization structure be redesigned to meet human needs--especially higher level needs like self-actualization--while Bennis¹² recommends that organizations must learn to change quickly so they may adapt to complex, turbulent environments. As Bennis sees it, then, organizations which cannot learn to change and change quickly will suffer the penalty of any ill-adapted organism--extinction. What this evolution in organizations will leave us is small, quick-witted, democratic organizations in contrast to the ponderous bureaucratic forms now expiring around us.

The point I wish to emphasize is that these views on organizations and these beliefs about what should be done to deal with their "problems" all rest upon an assumption: the assumption that an organization is an entity which has goals and which attempts to impose pattern or uniformity upon its members in line with those goals. These views imply a single, uniform responding entity which is the organization even though members may respond variously to it. Thus much

effort is spent among those who see themselves as organizational diagnosticians and doctors in trying to develop satisfying or effective relationships between members and the organization on the one hand and between the organization and its environment on the other. This belief in the organization as a thing conveniently allows for assessment of it. One may ask either how well the organization satisfies its members' needs or how well it achieves its goals. Where the organization is found wanting either as a satisfier of members' needs or as an instrument of goal achievement, the organization is revealed as needing change or improvement. Though the organizational doctors do not always agree on what to do with the diseased or ailing organization, there is no lack of prescriptions to deal with its maladies. In education these remedies vary from those that abolish the organization to those that merely transform it in some way.

And yet this notion of organization as a creation apart from people, as an entity capable of having goals and of responding to its environment creates a paradox. No matter how obvious it may appear that organizations are real nor how convenient it may be to deal with them conceptually as though they were real, organization theorists--if not men of practical affairs--must deal with some puzzling questions flowing from the idea of organizations as "real" things. If organizations are real but non-human, how can they have so human a thing as a goal and how can an organization behave, respond, or adapt when these are typically properties of organisms not organizations? While there may be many

analogies between organizations and organisms or between organizations and complex interacting physical systems, it is one thing to say these systems are like each other and quite another to say they are the same. With some notable exceptions,¹³ few organization theorists begin with the notion that organization goals are ideas held in the human mind rather than a property of an abstraction--the organization itself. With few exceptions¹⁴ organization theorists fail to ask how it is that individuals perceive the goals of an organization and orient their behaviour towards it. In short, few organization theorists see organizations as categories for understanding the world of social action, as categories which individuals create and which depend upon human acceptance and support. Instead, much of organization theory deals with human response to organization rather than with human activity in creating organizations.

The difference is important. The common view of organization sees it as a structure with rules, powers, and goals of its own. It is this structure, externally imposed, with which the individual must deal. Many critics of organization therefore see organization as inherently opposed to human purpose and wish to destroy it in order to free man of its chains. Other critics merely wish to make organization compatible with human needs and desires. If we see organizations not as imposed on man but as created by him we begin to ask some different questions about organizations. In this view, individuals not only create the organization,

they are the organization. To say that individuals create the organization and, indeed, are the organization is not to say that different individuals bring the same or similar ideas, aspirations, or needs to the organization. To see organization as created out of individual diversity is to recognize organization as a definition of social reality within which individuals interact; it is to see organization as "the everyday picture of the social world" which the individual builds and regards as merely "what everybody knows."¹⁵ In answer to the first question posed at the outset of this paper, we may say that organizations have goals in the same way that individuals have goals except that, in the organization, the individual must concern himself not only with his own goals but with those of others as well. Thus the concept of organization we are dealing with ~~here~~ is not a single uniform entity but a multi-faceted notion reflecting what the individual sees as his social world and what meanings and purposes the individual brings to or takes from that reality.

Bavelas baldly states the proposition basic to this notion of organization: "Human organizations are not biological organisms; they are social inventions."¹⁶ Following this line of thinking leads to the paradox that man not only creates his social reality, he then responds to it as something other than human invention. If organizations are a kind of invented social reality we should seek to understand them in terms of the world-taken-for-granted by

individuals involved with organizations or in terms of the individual's images of himself and of the organizations of which he is part.¹⁷ With this frame of reference, we should not be surprised to find that organizational structure has no uniform effect upon people but depends upon the person perceiving it and his definition of social reality. From this vantage point, too, we would probably regard it as useless to try to deal with a single organizational structure whether our aim was to abolish this structure, to change it, or to improve it. And with this view of organization, we would probably give up also attempts to judge the organization's effectiveness by comparing it to a single set of goals, whether these were external goals towards which bureaucracies are supposed to strive or whether these goals were those that organizations are thought to achieve through dynamic equilibrium with their environments.

Can Individual Goals Become Organizational Goals?

These considerations then raise the second question posed at the beginning of this paper: Given that individuals are in some way determinants of organization, how do goals of individuals get transformed into something we recognize as goals of the organization? To me the best answer to this question--though not a complete answer--is found in the decision-making tradition in organization theory¹⁸ which views organization as a social reality within which individuals see rules, pressures, demands, powers, and

dependencies. Organization thus becomes the perceived social reality within which individuals make decisions. The heart of this view is not a single abstraction called organization, but rather varied perceptions by individuals of what they can, should, or must do in dealing with others.¹⁹ When an individual shifts his frame of reference for decision-making, he thus shifts his organization. These ideas require us to abandon notions of organizations striving to achieve externally set targets or to achieve a simple equilibrium with the environment. Rather the view suggested is one of bargaining and coalition among individuals among whom conflict is never really resolved. Some coalitions among organization members or between them and outsiders turn out to be viable--at least in the short run--thus giving members of these coalitions the power to allocate resources or to divide the labour in ways which seem good to them. The goals of the organization in this view become the present preoccupations and intentions of the dominant organizational coalition. This conception of organizational goals does not require us to regard them as some ultimate end-point towards which the entire organization moves, nor need we regard goals as a steady state characterizing organization-environment relationships. Instead organizational goals may be as fleeting as the membership of the dominant coalition; organizational goals may be as changeable as members' views on what is practical, desirable, or essential to do. Above all this view of organizational goals frees us from the need

to see such goals as uniform and stable throughout the organization. Organizational goals are made understandable in human terms; they are as varied as are individuals and no more stable or rational than the individual.

What the proponents of this decision-making tradition in organization theory do not make clear is why and how others accept the definition of the situation made by dominant organizational coalitions. While it may help to resolve this problem by conceiving a balance between organizational inducements and member contributions,²⁰ the basic difficulty remains. We must explain the common but extraordinary situation in which we find members of organizations "actually performing tasks demanding a high degree of skill and involvement that are utterly remote from their personal interests and the rest of their cognitive field."²¹ By implication, then, we must begin to explain the behaviour of people in organizations in terms of the explanations and meanings which they themselves use, if we are to understand what is going on within those organizations. Instead of prescribing what kinds of behaviours would make for a healthy or effective organization if only people engaged in them, it might be better to find out first the motivations and goals that do in fact act as springs to individual action.

This line of thinking takes us back to an important but often neglected idea in the work of Max Weber. Weber cast his analysis of history and organization in terms of Verstehen,²² a concept requiring that the actions of men be

understood in terms meaningful to them, not in terms of values and meanings outside observers hold, however dearly they may hold them. Thus Weber classified organizations according to the "validity" and "legitimate order" which people have seen in them.²³ Elaborating on Weber's idea that organizations rest upon different conceptions of authority, Simon²⁴ pointed out that authority rests not with "persons of authority" but in a relationship between people built upon their beliefs about how they should behave towards each other. Thus in learning to believe in what one ought to do, one also shapes a role for oneself and ultimately creates an organization in which that role may be performed. Therefore the kinds of organization we live in derive not from their structure but from attitudes and experiences we bring to organizations from the wider society in which we live. To change organizations, then, requires more than a change in their structure; it requires changes in society itself and changes in meanings and purposes which individuals learn within their society.

This notion of organizations as dependent upon meanings and purposes which individuals bring from a wider society to organizations does not require that all individuals share the same meanings and purposes. On the contrary, the views I am outlining here should make us seek to discover the varying meanings and objectives which individuals bring to the organizations of which they are a part. We should look more carefully, too, for differences in objectives

between different kinds of people in organizations and begin to relate these to differences in power or access to resources. In particular, it appears that we should look closely at this matter in people-processing organizations, that is, organizations like schools, hospitals and prisons. Many organizations of this kind face some kind of crisis today. In the past, clients of these organizations, were usually not regarded as members of the organization. They were the raw material upon which the structure and technology of the organization worked. This view turned out to be tenable only so long as the clients of these organizations accepted this definition themselves. What we are apparently witnessing in the crisis facing many organizations in the people-processing business is a shift in belief--a shift in goal--among those members of these organizations we usually call clients. Increasingly frequent prison riots may reflect a view growing among both prisoners and wardens alike that prisons are not places in which people should be put.²⁵ Where prisoners used to strive to escape from prison, they now are likely to destroy the prison. Similarly new views are growing about what school ought to be and these are not usually views that can be found in official statements of educational objectives or in a functional analysis of school and environment relationships. Bereiter makes clear how a set of new social "facts" can alter the whole basis of school as an institution even though these "facts" may be perceived and acted upon as goals only by a small minority:

What seems to be happening is that the perspective of the outer world is penetrating the school.

The traditional school cannot survive such an invasion, for if goings on in school come to be judged by the same standards as goings on outside, they will be seen as ridiculous and the structure will collapse. You cannot have a room full of ten-year old Paul Goodmans and Edgar Z. Friedenbergs and hope to run a traditional school, especially if the teacher holds the same viewpoint.²⁶

Where do these ideas leave the concept of "organization?" I began this paper by wanting to deny or modify the common notion of organization as a structure having functions and goals apart from the individuals who inhabit the structure. I have emphasized the goals and meanings which individuals bring to their involvement with organizations. But what is that organization if it is not to be seen as separate from individuals? At the present time, I find myself unable to answer this question satisfactorily. Burns provides us with a beginning point when he speaks of organization as a "transducer" connecting a set of demands with a set of action consequences.²⁷ Now "transducer" is a term from physics designating a device which receives power in one form and transforms it into another. Thus a telephone transforms electric power into acoustic power. In organizations, the transforming mechanism lies within individuals. It is found in individuals striving to change their demands or beliefs

into definitions of reality others must regard as valid and accept as limitations on their own action. While this conception of organization permits us to speak of dominating demands and beliefs by some individuals, and while it permits us to explore how those with dominating views use the advantage of their position, we need not think of these dominating views as "necessary," "efficient," "satisfying," or even "functional," but merely as an invented social reality which holds for a time and then is vulnerable to redefinition through changing demands and beliefs among people. Our conceptions of organizations must be as complex as is the reality we try to understand.

Some Speculations and Implications

In sum, I have argued that we lack an adequate concept of organization, though we often behave as though we have one when it comes to designing organizations or changing old ones when we believe they need it. This inadequacy appears when we regard organizations as having structures independent of people and goals apart from human intentions. Mislead by this concept of organization as independent structure and purpose, many strategies for improving organization strive to reshape the structure, to reformulate its goals, or to achieve a better integration of the individual with the structure. In opposition to these views, I have put forward an alternate but less commonly held view that organizations are ideas held in the human mind, sets of beliefs--not always

compatible--which people hold about the ways they should relate to each other. Within these relationships, people act to realize values or to attain goals that are important to them. This alternate view holds that there is no overriding purpose which organizations serve and no single structure through which they operate; rather organizations incorporate a multiplicity of ends and uncertain means for achieving them. Rather than attempting to develop this admittedly incomplete notion any further, I might more readily clarify it by asking what its implications are for organizational analysis and for change strategies based upon such analysis.

Received notions of organization theory. What seems extraordinary in much of contemporary organizational analysis is that views which see organizations as "things" seem always to prevail over theories which see organizations as extensions of individuals. Traditions dealing with organizations as mechanisms or organisms usually find favour over those which, reflecting Weberian views, see organizations as the patterns of choice individuals make in pursuit of ends that are meaningful to them. It is this latter tradition--seen now in the work of March and Simon--which complexifies organizations in that it rejects the concept of organizations as uniform entities having limited purposes and a single structure to serve those purposes. Instead, organizations become as complex as human meaning and purpose. Understanding this complexity comes only by viewing it through

the eyes of those acting within it.

Facing such complexity, we may no longer deal with organizations as if they had a single structure and a single set of objectives. If this judgement is at all valid, then we should desist in our efforts to discover that organizational structure which is best adapted to the environment or which makes the organization most effective. Instead, we should put more effort into understanding the specific meanings, purposes, and problems of individuals involved in specific organizations. Though it may move against efforts to develop a "science" of organization wherein all propositions have universal force and validity, this seemingly anti-organizational view of organizations asks simply for a human perspective in understanding and judging organizations. Thompson has suggested that the assessment of organizations depends upon our beliefs about what it is desirable for an organization to do and upon our knowledge of means to achieve those ends.²⁸ Where there is dispute about ends, means, and outcomes--as appears to be the case with schools--we should have little faith in those organizational doctors who are so ready to diagnose organizational ailments and offer prescriptions for prompt recovery. Surely, as a minimum, we should be more careful than we usually are about making prescriptions for organizational change that assume similar dynamics in the operation of most if not all organizations. Although prescriptive organization theory--of which change theory is surely an example--is often based

almost exclusively upon study of economic organizations, one seldom gets the feeling that prescriptions for educational change are based upon theories and understandings that regard schools as unique entities. Organizational theories seem all too ready to assume that concepts like bureaucracy, participation, supervision, technology, workflow, and a host of others have the same meaning in organizations of all kinds regardless of the nature of the individuals involved in the organizations, the goals they pursue, and the cultural environment from which they come.

The propositions I have advanced above question the notion of a single theory of organization and of a single organizational change strategy appropriate to it. Yet few strategies for change in education try to give us a view of what this thing called "organization" is that it can be shaped and moulded and made "better". We seldom get the impression from reading the change literature that "organizations" may vary depending on where we find them and who is in them. It is perhaps significant that one must look to European scholars like Mayntz for trenchant criticisms of views which regard organizations as universal species subject to common laws:

The major critical argument which follows is that propositions which hold for such diverse phenomena as an army, a trade union, and a university, must necessarily be either trivial or so abstract as to tell hardly anything of interest about concrete

reality. . . . After all, the distinct character of an organization is certainly determined, among other things, by the nature, interests, and values of those who are instrumental in maintaining it.²⁹

This argument suggests that organization theorists have been so busy defining the forest that they have failed to notice differences among the trees--and worse--have ignored relevant data that are not trees at all. It suggests, too, that an academic industry which has set about to train administrators by disclosing to them the social-scientific secrets of how organizations work³⁰ or how policy should be made³¹ indulges at best in a premature hope and at worst in a delusion.

Organizations as they are. If organization theorists and change agents took seriously the views propounded here, they would put more emphasis upon open-ended inquiry into organizations and less upon strategies for improving them. Justification for this view rests on the assumption that present organization theory tells us too little about organizations as they really are and too much about the biases of the theorists and change agents. Thus organization theorists have spent much time saying that organizations ought to be "healthy" or that individuals ought to find fulfilment within them. There is virtually no end of statements that organizations ought to be adapted to their environments nor to prescriptions for improving that adaptation.

Instead of trying to build or verify more grand theory about organizations and instead of trying to remodel organizations the way they ought to be, it might be better to find out how organizations are able to survive in their supposedly crippled, ill-adapted, or non-satisfying forms. Such an investigation will take us into a study of human purpose and interaction within organization; it will take us into the study of individual reaction to role structure rather than into explanations of why certain role structures are "necessary." In looking at organizations more squarely as they are, we will have to start looking at schools as schools and not as some presumed sub-species of an ideal type called organization. For all their acknowledged importance, it is extraordinary how little we know and study schools as organizations in their own right. Instead when we theorize about schools as organizations, we are likely to borrow ideas and models from other areas of organizational study. When we come to analyze or improve schools we are apt to reach for concepts developed to describe other kinds of organizations. Thus much of our effort to understand schools as organizations is cast in terms of bureaucratic theory, general social structure, or industrial psychology and sociology. While extensions to schools from these other fields of study may "work" in some sense, they cannot substitute for a more basic understanding of schools in their own terms. Similarly, revisionist historians, who use bureaucracy as a Schimpfwort for describing schools, fail to distinguish the hopes and expectations which people of one time and place may have held for

schools with those we now hold for them.³² Instead they use the values of the present to judge the actions of the past.

Understanding schools in their own terms will require more direct and active attention to understanding school experience for its own sake. For this purpose, a comparative and historical perspective is essential.³³ We must begin to understand more thoroughly and deeply the varieties of experience people have within the organizations we call schools and we must not limit the experiences studied to those of particular groups. The varied and often conflicting views of teachers and administrators are important but we need also to know about pupils, parents, and school board members and to know them within a perspective which relates these various groups to each other. We need to compare the meanings, experiences, and understandings found in particular schools in one time and place with those found in other times and places. It is only through such comparison that we may come to understand the frame of reference, the world-taken-for-granted, which defines "school." In abandoning received theories about organizations in general and about schools in particular, we will have to look to a new kind of research--one that builds theory from the data rather than one that selects data to confirm theories developed apart from the data. This requirement directs us to theory built from observations in specific organizations; it directs us as well to understanding the actions, purposes, and experiences of organizational members in terms that make sense to them.³⁴

Excessive concern with structure and process. In

recent years, there has been what may be described as an excessive concern for the internal structure and process of organizations. This concern flows from the belief that organizations have goals and that if we can just get the structure or process "right," organizations would be more effective in achieving goals or better adapted to their environments. For example, a few years ago, educational administrators were much concerned with the "organizational climate" of schools and we came to believe that organizations had climates in about the same way that people had personalities.³⁵ The discovery or belief that organizations have climates led, of course, to judgements about which climates were good and which were bad. Since measuring a school climate required only the administration of a few questionnaires and some whiz-bang factor analyses, it was easy enough to diagnose personality ailments in school organization and to suggest that those organizations with bad personalities should improve them. This kind of analysis is like earlier studies of leader behaviour or later ones concerned with organizational health in that they all attempt to identify a single, critical variable within the organization which may be manipulated to improve it. Though empirical researches find that organizational structure bears only a tenuous and inconsistent relationship to human experience, the researchers³⁶ continue to hope that better measurement and methodology will yet substantiate the Marxian thesis that organization determines the experience of persons within it.

What these analyses fail to tell us is how leadership, climate, or health arise and whether these notions denote concerns of persons involved in the organization. Lacking this understanding, it appears to me, that there is really very little we can do to "improve" leadership, climate, or health in an organization.

Radical critics of education take the concern for structure and process one step further than more conventional organizational analysts. Where the conventional analyst is likely to strive to get the "right" structure or process in an organization, the radical critic is apt to believe that there is something inherently wrong with organizational structure and that it exerts a baneful effect upon the human personality. The belief dies hard that organizational structure is "real" and independent of human meaning and purpose. We begin to get a glimmer of what we are dealing with in organizational structure and human response to it when we look at the experiences of some of the radical critics of education in their efforts to build better schools. What have their reforms wrought? The evidence is incomplete but provocative: The freedom of the alternative school turns into patterned, predictable romanticism where everybody "does his own thing" in sadly similar ways, but where it is no more probable children will learn to read and do arithmetic than it is in conventional schools.³⁷ Decentralization of education leaves pressing social problems unsolved and gives expression to some human values that are abhorrent to radical critics.³⁸ "Organic growth" in an

organization and wide-spread participation in decision-making lead not to harmony and truth but conflict and stress:

. . . The experience of Metro and other alternative schools suggests that what emerges "organically" in an alternative school is not a new person or community, but rather those deeply ingrained patterns of thought and action of the traditional society and the patterns of functioning that govern the operation of any complex organization.³⁹

It is exactly those "deeply ingrained patterns of thought and action" which we must begin to understand if we are to understand organizations and to change them. Shifting the external trappings of organization--which we may call organization structure if we wish--turns out to be easier than altering the deeper meanings and purposes which people express through organization. Usually we are aware of these meanings and purposes only when we try to change them in ourselves or others. Thus some radical critics of education have become painfully aware of differences between their own and others' values when they removed the conventional structures of organization. The result was not to abolish the problems which they saw as inherent in structure but to discover these problems in a new form. To explain this outcome we are forced to see problems of organizational structure as inherent not in structure itself but in the human meanings and purposes which support that structure. Thus it appears that we cannot solve organizational problems by either abolishing or improving structure

alone. We may begin to deal with some intractable organizational problems by looking at their human foundations.

Rationality in organizational design. Despite some painful evidence to the contrary, many critics of existing organizations assume they know how to design better ones. In contrast, I suggest that we begin to look systematically at the way we build our organizational worlds before we prescribe solutions to all organizational ills. Looking at organizations in this way reveals people, their views and values, as the fundamental building blocks of organizations. What we call structure may represent these views but its effect upon people and events is at best uncertain. There is a kind of cultural imperialism or arrogance that goes with prescribing how organizations ought to be unless we know how individuals interpret and respond to the organizational world in which they now live. In the city in which I live, educational radicals recently won a hard fight to permit parents in the lower socio-economic community the right to participate in the selection of the school principal. The parents duly met and decided by a large majority that they did not want to participate in such a selection. In one of my own projects, we persuaded a rural school system to consult the community about its objectives for policy and program. To our surprise, about the only large group interested in such matters were the professional educators of the county. What interested the public was not general aims and policy, but the details of school operation--the very things which educators in the county regarded as matters for pro-

fessional not public decision. The public was interested but in the "wrong" things. A standard answer to such problems holds that the public can learn to deal with the larger issues and become interested in the "right" things. It would be easier, however, to recognize that such events are anomalous only from the perspective of certain theories about how people ought to behave in organizations. In place of such theories we need to know more about how people are in fact involved with organizations and whose views within them command decision-making powers.

In the conventional way of looking at organizations, we resolutely split ends and means; we insist on thinking of organizations as means for the attainment of specified goals. This view fosters rational analysis of organization in that the goals provide criteria for assessing the organization and for judging whether specific policies and practices serve the agreed upon goals. Such rationality forms the basis for programmed budgeting and management by objectives. Unfortunately, these schemes appear to assume a more rational world than actually exists, thus accounting for the frequent failure of such schemes in the real world. At least, they assume a different kind of rationality than usually prevails in the organizational world. In education, for example, we seem to think we need formal goals to define what goes on in schools. The assumption is that present activity is best understood not as an end in itself but as a means to an end; the assumption is that present activity arises not for its own sake, but because some ultimate goals calls it into existence. Thus, to return to an

earlier example, the interest of rural parents in school practices rather than educational aims comes as a surprise to professional educators and their university-based consultants.

But do end-point goals actually energize the action of people involved with schools? If we follow Weber's action analysis,⁴⁰ we would first seek to understand schools in terms of the subjective rationality of those involved with them before we strive to transform them. Instead of prescribing new goals for education or new models for achieving them, we would begin to look at the diversity of objectives which different people in an organization can have and begin to explore how and when these shift. Perhaps we might begin to realize, as Weber did, that many actions in organizations are best seen not as means towards some ultimate end but rather as ends in themselves. I am sure there are many people involved with schools for whom certain educational end products are important goals. I am also fairly sure there are many others for whom process is more important than product. There are those among us who simply believe in "open schools," in "strict discipline," or in a host of other qualities they wish schools to have. And on these beliefs, people are seldom willing to compromise or negotiate, since these beliefs do not represent means towards ends but are rather ends in themselves. Thus for some of us participation, openness, authenticity, and trust are good things; others may value knowledge, achievement, competition, and "high standards." Some of these characteristics may be

thought of as ends in themselves, others may be thought of as means to other ends. Achievement of some of these goals may be assessed "objectively" by external evaluators, others only "subjectively" by those involved. My point is only that we need to know more about what objectives people in schools have and to discover how they change and whose goals hold the day when it comes to conflict and disagreement over what should be done, how, when, where and to whom. Answers to these questions may not only give us a better notion of what goes on within schools, it may make us more cautious in assessing them against a narrow set of summative criteria and less willing to prescribe single solutions for improving schools.

Technology, goals, and effectiveness. The notion of effectiveness in organizations implies accepted goals and reliable means for achieving them. Conceiving technology as "reliable means for achieving goals,"⁴¹ conventional theory sees organizations as striving to increase the reliability of technology or to reduce the cost of its application. This notion of organizational effectiveness requires revision if, as this paper suggests, we may no longer think of a simple set of organization goals nor indeed rely on the notion of an abstract entity--the organization--which holds the goals. The view of organizations as reflections of varied human purposes makes it difficult if not impossible to apply simple criteria for measurement of organizational effectiveness. The basic difficulty is that we cannot speak--as does so much of applied organization theory--about increasing

organizational effectiveness unless we accomplish two clear but often neglected tasks. One is to map the versions of reality which people in school see around themselves. The second is to discover stresses and disjunctures which threaten these definitions of reality. Implied in these tasks is a third one: developing the commitment of people towards new social goals and means they perceive as effective for achieving them.⁴² It is my contention that we might better carry out this third task--the task of building an organization--if we completed the other two first, since we would then have a clearer picture of the existing organizational world and forces within it. Whether such knowledge permits us to speak of "designing" organizations is still an open question, since we so poorly comprehend what is involved in that task. What seems clear is that we should view skeptically any presumed rules for designing organizations and abandon any presumed universal models for the good school until we know more about what people want from schools and how they believe they can attain it.

We must overcome as well our rational proclivity for dealing with educational aspirations exclusively in terms of end-point goals, which we presume motivate current activities, but are themselves seldom attained in the here-and-now. The question of what motivates men in organizations to action is, of course, an empirical one, though more organizational analysts "postulate" motivators than explore them through open-ended investigation.⁴³ I wish to point out here only that

more goals than we usually recognize in organizational life may fall in the category "things it is right to do" rather than in the category "ends that are to be accomplished." The one kind of goal is oriented to the present and the other to the future, and I suggest that many people are present-oriented rather than future-oriented as good, efficiency-minded organization theory requires them to be.

Thus a problem in making organizations more effective may be that many people do not hold goals for them in the sense of ends that the organization is to accomplish. Rather these people merely hold a set of beliefs about what it is right to do in an organization. The person who holds that a given percentage of the school budget should be devoted to research is expressing a belief about what it is right to do in the organization rather than a preference for an end the organization should accomplish. Such a person is satisfied--although perhaps temporarily--by the allocation of money to research not by the product of research. It is my suspicion that many goals in education are of this type and reflect our beliefs about the quality of experience we desire to have in schools, the way resources are to be distributed, or the ways people should behave toward each other. For these kinds of goals, technology is not necessary: people in organizations are either able to express their beliefs in behaviour or they are not able to do so.

Other goals in education represent ends to be accomplished in the future through the direction and coordination

of activities in the present. Many of the standard goals of education are of this type in that they describe skills to be acquired or knowledge to be attained. For these kinds of goals, technology is essential in that it is an instrument for the accomplishment of the goals.

Perhaps we should recognize that these two kinds of goals are often interwoven in the organizations we call schools. For example, it is a widely accepted goal that children should learn to read in school and, indeed, even children may hold this goal. Now, in my view, such a goal is talking about an end-point to be attained and therefore calls into play the question of what technology is effective in teaching children to read. Inevitably, however, in trying to apply technology in pursuit of a reading goal, we will encounter other kinds of goals--goals that express people's beliefs about how that technology should be used. Or we may say that technology used in pursuit of end-point goals requires people involved with the technology to accept both the technology and the circumstances it is to be used in. People are thus likely to express goals having to do with the climate of the classroom in which the reading instruction takes place or they have preferences about the content of the reading material itself. Rationality in the design of organizations seems to require that we separate decisions with respect to these two kinds of goals. We must ask what ends it is possible to accomplish with existing educational technology and we must ask under what conditions we are to apply that technology.

In making decisions about these two kinds of goals, we should not believe that people are invariably satisfied as long as end-point goals are being achieved nor that intended end-point goals are being achieved as long as people are satisfied by current circumstances.

Schools as images of culture. If Bereiter is correct, schools have the technology to accomplish only a very limited set of end-point goals.⁴⁴ We cannot, he says, educate children in the sense of building wholesome personalities and responsible citizens. What we can do is make children (and possibly their parents) happy in school and we can train them, where we have developed the technologies, to perform certain skills involved in reading, calculation, and playing games or musical instruments. This view brings us to some puzzling questions. What are schools and what is going on in them? Why do people go to school or require others to do so? What do they think schools do, if, as Bereiter suggests, their yield in terms of goals accomplished is so modest?

What many people seem to want from schools is that schools should reflect the values that are central and meaningful in their lives. If this view is correct, schools are cultural artifacts which people struggle to shape in the image of their own values. Only in such forms do they have faith in them; only in such forms can they participate comfortably in them. For this reason, schools may be more important to people as symbols and rituals than as means for accomplishing ends. Thus linked to personal values and beliefs, schools

suffer the cultural crises of our times, as alternate ideologies compete for validation through them. While educational radicals see decadence in all modern institutions, they still keep a place for schools in the new society because they believe in schools as staging grounds for the "long march through institutions."⁴⁵ To such radicals, schools appear as instruments for the transformation of cultural values.

Certainly, it is easy enough to see Kulturkampf in the controversy over the television program "Sesame Street," which Holt, writing from an American perspective, could condemn as mindless technology put to the service of conventional learning.⁴⁶ But "Sesame Street" does carry culturally rich notions of what school is and how people should act there. Such a conclusion appears most clearly from the program's reception abroad where its meanings loom incongruously against other assumptions about schools. Where Holt saw just plain school, many West Germans saw a disturbing innovation threatening their own conception of school and the place of children in it. This perceived threat was strong enough to persuade broadcasting systems in half of the federal states of West Germany to reject the program even in its Germanized version. The program had generated culture shock among its adult viewers and moved one critic to observe "In Germany, laughing and learning have never belonged together."⁴⁷ However, the desire to separate entertainment and education strikes an American producer of the program as "a lunatic view."⁴⁸ Thus what appears largely as an extension of a familiar technology

in one context⁴⁹ seems a new definition of social architecture in another.

These cultural examples point to the importance of faith or belief as determiners of organizations. Achieving end-point goals may not be a primary motive for many people in schools. Evidence of goal accomplishment or lack of it may therefore be a matter of indifference to them, whereas their need to believe is paramount--their need, that is, to believe that what they do in school is right and good. If we do not believe in what we do, can we do it? Ends and means in schools are closely intertwined and may in fact be interchangeable as far as motivation to action is concerned.

When we ask the question, "What organizational designs will achieve specified educational goals?" we must also ask, "Who believes in these goals?" and "Who believes he knows how to act so as to achieve them?" We may learn something about institution building and organizational design by looking closely at the actual goals of people in school and at the means they believe are right for achieving them. Lacking such knowledge, we should cease trying to devise structures which will maximize the effectiveness of the organization as a whole in relation to a set of goals that someone thinks people in schools do--or at least ought to--pursue. In this way, we will become concerned not only for a variety of goals and with technologies or strategies for accomplishing them, but we will also explore the process by which people come to believe in goals and work to achieve them. In short we will study with new eyes how people build organizations.

Conclusion

Most theories of organization grossly simplify the nature of the reality they deal with. The drive to see organizations as a single kind of entity with a life of its own apart from the perceptions and beliefs of those involved with them blinds us to the complexity and variety of organizations people create around themselves. It leads us to believe that it is some abstract thing called "organization" which must be changed rather than socially maintained beliefs about how people should relate to each other and how they may attain desired goals. The closer we look at organizations the more likely we are to find expressions of diverse human meanings. The focus of investigation should not be, "What can be done to improve this organization?" but, "Whose meanings define what is right to do among people here involved with each other?" The difference in these questions is, of course, the difference between ought and is. But we will judge what is and we will call Machiavelli immoral for separating ends and means. Yet when we come to judge our organizations, will we think of them as artifacts of human creation and remember what it is we judge? If we do, we may come to agree with Cassius:

The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in our stars,
But in ourselves. . . .

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